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Think Eco, Be Eco?

The tension between attitudes and behaviours of millennial fashion consumers

ABSTRACT

This research examines the tensions experienced by millennials between their desire to purchase fast-fashion and their growing concern for sustainability. The ethical and sustainable consumption literature has long recognised this misalignment of value, often referred to as an attitude-behaviour gap. While previous research has explored the reasons behind the attitude-behaviour gap and the rationales constructed by consumers to alleviate any associated tensions between mismatched values, this has not been framed within Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, particularly for fashion acquisition. This seems somewhat remiss, especially given that Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance has been successfully applied in other consumption contexts and has offered commercial and social marketing opportunities for marketing activity development. The research utilises Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance on qualitative data collected from 38 millennial participants living in Scotland. Adopting an interpretive approach, a semi-structured interview template was administered online and data were analysed thematically, revealing that an infusion of eco-fashion awareness was filtering into millennials' consciousness. While the millennials reported feelings of cognitive dissonance when purchasing fast-fashion such as 'irritation' and 'guilt', unlike previous research, here they did not attempt to justify their behaviour in order to resolve their feelings of dissonance. Rather, the

participants perceived this as an opportunity to reaffirm their preferences for sustainability for future consumption practice. Limitations include the small sample; nevertheless, the data contributes to the overall understanding of millennial eco-fashion consumption, the attitude-behaviour gap and the occurrence and resolutions of cognitive dissonance.

KEY WORDS

Cognitive dissonance, attitude-behaviour gap, sustainable consumption, fashion consumption, eco-fashion, feelings of inconsistency, action perception, belief, resolution of dissonance, self-concept, self-congruence

1. INTRODUCTION

The current unprecedented extreme weather conditions and the global Covid-19 pandemic are thought to be fuelled by climate change and environmental abuse (Elliot, 2020; Weston, 2020). Many industries are implementing targets to address sustainability, driven by concerns that the effects of climate change on the environment will be irreversible within nine years (Cockburn, 2018). Concerningly, the mainstream fashion industry is stagnating within entrenched fast-fashion models of accelerated production and consumption that exacerbate the issues (McNeill et al., 2020; Ritch, 2020; McNeill and Venter, 2019).

Rapid cycles of new trends encourage consumers to buy fashion more frequently, then dispose of garments when their trendiness subsides (McNeill et al., 2020; Papahristou and Bilalis, 2017). In 2016, UK consumers purchased 1.1 million tonnes of clothing, generating 26.2 million tonnes of CO², all of which resulted in 235 million items of

clothing sent to landfill (Batelier, 2018). Additionally, it was found that UK consumers never wear around £30 billion worth of clothes in their wardrobes (WRAP, 2012) – a figure that can be assumed to have risen significantly over the last decade. While these may appear benign behaviours, consumption, hoarding and disposal all generate CO². More recently, Degenstein, McQueen, McNeill, Hamlin, Wakes and Dunn (2020) found that Canadian consumers demonstrated awareness of the detrimental impact of sending clothing to landfill, and had begun to consider alternative routes even if the garment was badly damaged. Rather, clothing was donated to charity, whereas clothing suitable for re-wear was sold or swapped within informal networks. However, this does not solve the issue of accelerated production, reliant on marketing tactics to encourage consumption. Low price points and rapid trend changes amplify the fashion supply-chain's reliance on the earth's natural resources, contributing to water pollution, textile wastage and release of hazardous chemicals into the atmosphere (WRAP, 2017; Rivoli, 2009; Fletcher, 2008). Further, allegations that garment-workers are poorly paid and experience exploitative and impoverished working conditions (Arslan, 2020; Selwyn, Musiolek and Ijarja, 2020; Scaturro, 2008) add to the social unsustainability of the industry. Whilst many high street fashion retailers allude to acknowledging the issues, this appears secondary to encouraging consumers to purchase new garments with a limited lifespan. Exploitation of both the environment and garment-workers has intensified since the global Covid-19 pandemic (BBC News, 2020), a direct illustration that the fast-fashion business model is neither future-proof nor resilient, and heavily reliant on an outdated economic model.

This research examines how consumers navigate the acquisition of fashion and their concern for sustainability within mainstream markets. Specifically, the research focuses on millennials (Generation-Y) who are highly engaged with fast-fashion, a

business model of rapidly-evolving fashion trends with inexpensive price points that encourage frequent impulsive consumption (McNeill et al., 2020; Loureiro and Breazeale, 2016). Rather contradictorily, millennials are also highly concerned about climate change. The Global Shapers' Annual Survey 2017 found that for the third consecutive year, climate change was millennials' main concern and that 91 per cent believed that science has proven that humans are responsible for climate change (World Economic Forum, 2017). Millennials are engaged and active: this is evident in their global mobilisation to make sustainability a priority for government and businesses (Laville and Watt, 2019; Taylor et al, 2019), and in behaviour changes that address environmental concerns, such as their increasing adoption of veganism (Costa et al., 2019; Phua, Jin & Kim, 2019). However, the paradox between relentless fashion cycles, and slow or sustainable consumption and protecting scarce resources, does not lend itself to an easy solution, especially when this is a cohort attuned to fashion involvement sensitivity (McNeill et al., 2020). Therefore, the discrepancy between wanting to adopt sustainable-fashion practice and feeling equipped to do so is worthy of examination, particularly from a millennial perspective (Luna-Cortés et al., 2019 and Luna-Cortés, López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla, 2019), to progress the sustainability agenda.

Over the last couple of decades, the literature examining consumers' intention to purchase sustainable goods and actual consumption has identified a well-established '*attitude-behaviour gap*' (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000), especially for fashion (Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016; McNeill and Moore, 2015). This inconsistency can trigger feelings of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), as identified in previous ethical behaviours, such as transportation and tourism (Juvan and Dolnicar, 2014). However,

investigations of cognitive dissonance have been neglected in relation to fashion acquisition (Shaw, Carrington and Chatzidakis, 2016); therefore, this research examines cognitive dissonance tensions as experienced by the millennial generation. Subsequently, the research questions that guide this research are:

1. What sustainable adaptations have millennial consumers incorporated into everyday behaviours?
2. How do millennial consumers manage cognitive dissonance implications from fashion acquisition?
3. How does the role of self-concept prevent the integration of sustainable-fashion acquisition?

Assuming millennials are more susceptible to experience cognitive dissonance, because of their sustainability leanings (Luna-Cortés, López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla, 2019), this research provides new insights that enable a better understanding of the innate contradiction between sustainable practices evoking a minimal environmental footprint and long-term usage (Lundblad and Davies, 2016), and the fast-fashion industry's reliance on an extensive environmental footprint and short-term usage (WRAP, 2017). First, the research reviews existing literature regarding the attitude-behaviour gap concept and Festinger's cognitive dissonance (1957) theory. Second, it explores retailers' and consumers' engagement with eco-fashion, followed by millennials' generational traits including their decision-making processes, and thereafter identifies the methodological approach. Lastly, the paper discusses and analyses the data findings before concluding the research. Whilst acknowledging that sustainability incorporates human rights and wellbeing, this research paper focuses

exclusively on consumer perspectives of environmental sustainability and 'eco-fashion'.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Eco-fashion in mainstream markets

Eco-fashion can be defined as '*an innovative technological framework containing thoughtful manufacturing processes and consumption patterns*' (Scaturro, 2008 p.475) that mindfully makes the most of scarce resources (Fletcher, 2008). In the literature, consumer efforts to apply pro-environmental concerns to fashion consumption reveal various strategies such as: reducing consumption (Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016), buying from second-hand markets (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016), and '*green-fashion consumption*', which may include garments made from recycled polyester, organic fabric or relate to sustainable production processes such as reducing water consumption (Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018). Terms such as '*organic*', '*vegan*' and '*biodegradable*' are now key filters appearing on online fashion retailers' websites like ASOS, a prominent UK online fast-fashion retailer (Atamian Hahn-Petersen, 2018), expressing millennials' interest for sustainable fabrics used in clothing. Similarly, Rolling, Seifert, Chattaraman and Sadachar (2020) examined millennials dissonance concerning luxury brands stance for using either faux or real fur. They found that when brands adopt a pro-faux fur stance, millennials who support animal welfare had higher levels of purchase intention. Rolling et al., conclude that millennials are against the use of fur for luxury goods, preferring ethical alternatives. However, sustainably produced garments are not widely available in mainstream retailers (Ritch, 2020) when compared to the vast array

of affordable garments produced using the fast-fashion business model (Reimers, Magnuson and Chao, 2016). Affordability and easily accessible new fashion shape consumer practice by inducing more frequent browsing and purchasing of fashion (Kidd, Ritch and Carey, 2020). Moreover, responsive marketing such as snap sales, free delivery and interest free payment options further reduce barriers to consumption (Keegan, Ritch and Siddiqui, 2021). Previous research has found that those marketing tactics entice repetitive consumption and provide instant gratification (Keegan, Ritch and Siddiqui, 2021; Kidd, Ritch and Carey, 2020). McNeill et al. (2020) examined young fashion consumers' fashion sensitivity - and the concept that fashion expression aligns with self-identify and provides hedonistic emotions- to better understand what encourages overconsumption. They found that consumption and disposal was motivated by stylistic requirements, thereby exacerbating the cycle of fast fashion, despite their participants being sustainable in other consumption contexts (e.g. recycling paper, plastic, glass, and metals). McNeill et al. (2020) conclude that this is linked to a social emphasis driving societal expectations.

The fashion industry is conscious of consumers' growing awareness and some fast-fashion retailers have responded to sustainability by producing clothes made from sustainable materials (organic, recycled, etc.), and encourage consumers to return unwanted fashion to the store (Ritch, 2020). However, the overall premise is still to encourage consumption rather than make the most of resources already in circulation: this still perpetuates accelerated consumption and disposal (Ritch, 2020). It is the volume of fashion production, consumption and disposal that is unsustainable, especially when low prices are reliant on exploiting people and resources (Ritch, 2019) and as a result the quality of fast-fashion reduces to around ten wears (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). Therefore, we conceptualise two issues that prohibit the

mainstreaming of eco-fashion: the abundance of inexpensive rapid fast-fashion easily available in mainstream shopping channels providing instant gratification, versus concern for wider and future orientated planetary protection. In this context, fast-fashion is easily accessed and disposed of (Papahristou and Bilalis, 2017), encourages the desire for rapid trend change and novelty (Reimers, Magnuson and Chao, 2016; Niinimäki, 2010) and illustrates that price, style, fit, trend, quality and the shopping experience are valued over environmental issues (Bly, Gwozdz and Reisch, 2015). Consequently, a paradigm realignment is required to consider the relationship between sustainability, fashion and millennial consumption.

2.2. Attitude-behaviour gap

The sustainable-fashion literature has noted the prevalence of an '*attitude-behaviour gap*', where preferences for sustainable (or ethical) consumption do not always manifest in actual consumption practice (Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016; McNeill and Moore, 2015). The attitude-behaviour gap may be a consequence of social desirability bias, where consumers overstate their ethical/sustainable leanings to align with what they consider to be socially acceptable behaviour (Achabou, 2020). However, previous research has found that consumers apply justifications to rationalise the gap such as: sustainable fashion is more expensive, it is less convenient to access, there is insufficient information on sustainability implications, and sustainable fashion does not follow fashion trends (McNeill et al., 2020; Atamian Hahn-Petersen, 2018; Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016; Joyner Armstrong et al., 2016; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016; McNeill and Moore, 2015). This suggests that consumers are unlikely to implement their own sustainable strategies if they perceive

some kind of sacrifice that impacts upon their time, enjoyment, or hedonistic experience.

The mainstream marketplace does not offer sustainable-fashion that satisfies consumer needs or sufficient information to guide their knowledge of the implications of their purchases (Ritch, 2020). This is a barrier that has permeated the fashion consumption industry for two decades now, causing friction between consumers' consumption and their ethical congruency. While fast-fashion has conditioned consumers to be more price sensitive (Ritch and Brownlie, 2016), consumers also compare the vast impact of the fashion industry and perceive their individual act of purchasing eco-fashion as insignificant, particularly when they have no control or insight into production practice (Ritch, 2020). The insignificance of individual consumer actions may lead to consumers experiencing cognitive dissonance. Lundblad and Davies (2016) agree that consumers are disempowered by the lack of education on sustainable production, despite the many opportunities in traditional and digital communication channels to provide information. However, this does not explain why consumers who feel passionately about environmental conservation and human rights, and perhaps apply those values in other consumption contexts, might engage in fashion consumption behaviours that oppose their ethical beliefs. For example, despite the lack of recognition of sustainability in mainstream fashion, fashion acquisition could be redirected to second-hand markets (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016) and making less fashion purchases (Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016). Yet, consumers do not tend to look beyond mainstream fashion retailers, despite often experiencing discomfort when considering the consequences of their behaviours. Hence, this research seeks to fill this gap by understanding how the cognitive dissonance tensions (summarised in Table 1) below are experienced.

Table 1: Opposing components of fashion orientation (sensitivity) and perceptions of fashion sustainability

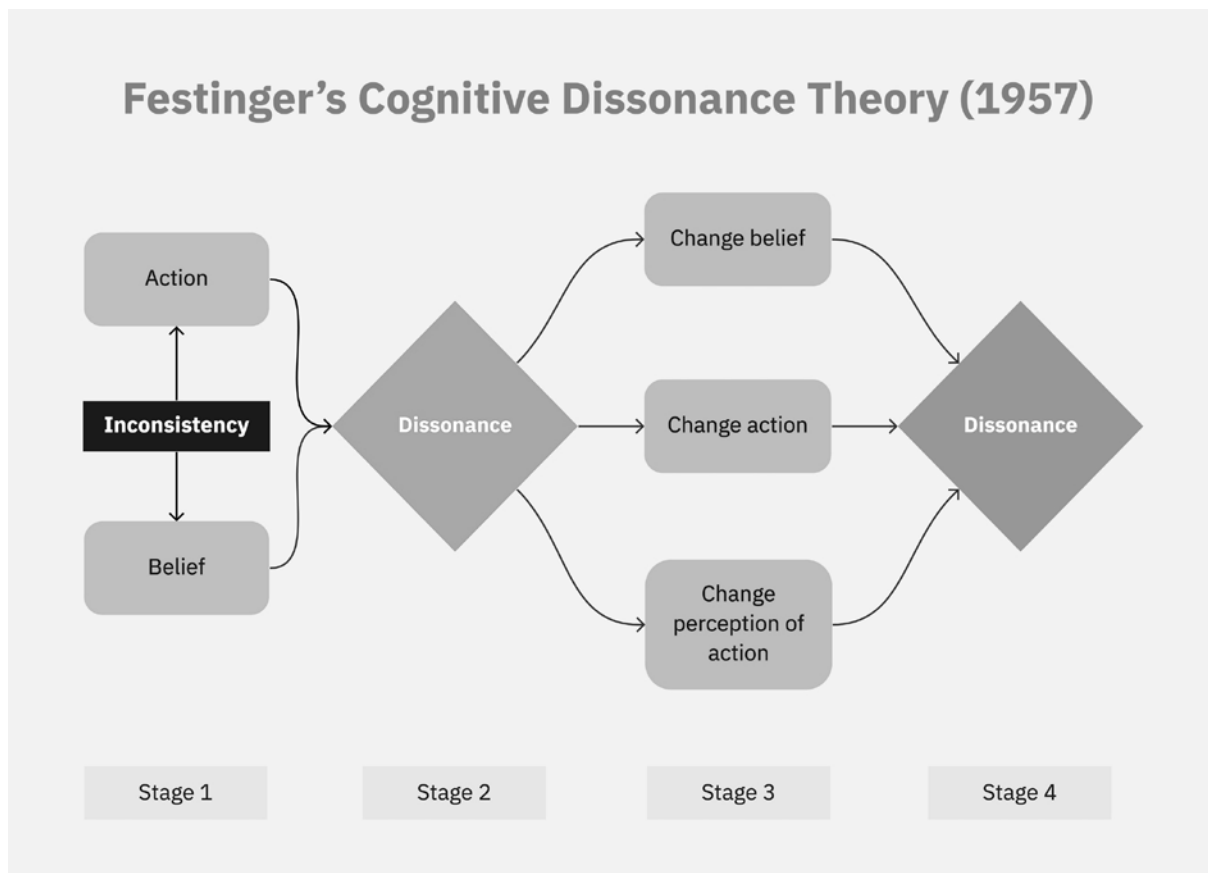
Fashion orientation		Sustainability
Social norms of consumption Kidd, Ritch and Carey (2020) McNeill et al. (2020)	The intersection of the Attitude-Behaviour gap and site for Cognitive Dissonance	Insignificance of individual behaviours Ritch (2020)
Marketing tactics Keegan, Ritch and Siddiqui (2021)		Price sensitivity Ritch and Brownlie (2016)
Ease of access Papahristou and Bilalis, (2017) Reimers, Magnuson and Chao (2016) Bly, Gwozdz and Reisch (2015)		Style sacrifice McNeill et al. (2020) Atamian Hahn-Petersen (2018) Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs (2018) Harris, Roby and Dibb (2016) Joyner Armstrong et al. (2016) Ritch and Brownlie (2016) McNeill and Moore (2015)
Instant gratification Kidd, Ritch and Carey (2020) McNeill et al. (2020) Niinimäki (2010)		Disempowerment Lundblad and Davies (2016)

2.3. Cognitive Dissonance theory

Researchers have developed a number of conceptualisations to explain those rationalisations and tensions: neutralisation (Ritch and Brownlie, 2016); paradoxical behaviours (Jägel et al., 2012); ethical purchasing gap (Bray, Johns and Kilburn, 2011); rationales and justifications (Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney, 2010); and ambivalence (Valor, 2007). As illustrated above, much of the sustainable/ethical fashion consumption literature has identified that consumers feel unable to act upon behaviours consistent with their attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Within the complexity of consumer decision making lies Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Figure 1), developed to explain feelings of discomfort, dissatisfaction, regret or psychological stress that consumers may experience due to conflicting beliefs and

actions (Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik, 2020). Emerging from humans' *'innate desire'* for consistency (Cooper, 2007; Thøgersen, 2004: 101), the theory postulates that to resolve cognitive dissonance, consumers will either change their belief system or change their action, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Conceptualised framework developed from Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory (1957)



The figure presents dissonance as an outcome of the inconsistency between action and belief, and how efforts of changing belief, action or perception of the action can help resolve tension. The theory has been applied to a number of different consumption contexts, from understanding unhealthy behaviours such as smoking (Fotuhi et al., 2013) to clothing acquisition contexts (Achabou, 2020). Achabou (2020) examined branding and how important CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) activities are to consumers. This research focused on Patagonia, a brand that

acknowledges CSR and sustainability within all aspects of supply chain management, and Nike who have previously been alleged of exploitation within their supply chain. The participants exhibited preferences for Nike over Patagonia and Achabou (2020) concluded that branding was considered more important than CSR activities. As postulated above, this is a focus on consumer centric attributes of brand value and Achabou (2020) conceptualised these behaviours in relation to cognitive dissonance theory as:

- No behavioural change: expressing ignorance of sustainability and ethical issues
- Change in belief: price, style, branding is more important than social and environmental issues
- Creating a new belief: to reward Nike for addressing supply chain management, despite this not being as impactful as Patagonia's approach
- Ignoring any conflict: denying concerns that Nike are exploitative

Given the literature examining consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion along with Achabou's (2020) application of data to cognitive dissonance theory, it is evident that consumer centric attributes of style, price and branding will trigger feelings of dissonance (Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik, 2020). While Aronson (1968) found that cognitive dissonance will encourage individuals to override and resolve the behaviour, other research postulates that it is psychological emotions and attitudes that require resolution (McDonald et al., 2015; Steele and Lui, 1983). Additionally, the theory is useful when applied to situations of negative post-purchasing behaviours after a high involvement purchase (Nayeem and Casidy, 2013). Fashion is typically seen as a high-involvement purchase as consumers consider a number of variables like fashion trends, price points, brand names and associations (Shim and Kotsiopulos, 1992),

therefore consumers may experience regret after the hedonistic impulsive feeling of consumption (Keegan, Ritch and Siddiqui, 2021; Liapati, Assiouras and Decaudin, 2015). High involvement is also located in fashion sensitivity, identity, ego and hedonism, as identified by McNeill et al. (2020) above. Therefore, it is valuable to explore how feelings of dissonance between fashion hedonism and concern for sustainability are managed and how this might shape future consumption (Bawa and Kansal, 2008).

2.4. Self-concept

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) is related to self-concept (Aronson 1968), as values and dissonance are uniquely constructed by individuals - as are identities. Self-concept is a “multi-faceted phenomenon” (Markus and Wurf, 1987; p.301) defined as an individual’s understanding of their beliefs and feelings about one’s self (Bailey, 2003). There are various forms of self-concept: some are based on present, future or past behaviours; some are based on social experiences; some on the desired self or undesired self, and some are more elaborate and significant than others (Markus and Wurf, 1987). It can be said that fashion consumption is intrinsically linked with self-concept, and particularly significant to the younger millennial cohort, as they build their self-identity through influences from family and friends, and also media like fashion and music to create associations, social mobility, positioning and status (Jacobsen and Barnes, 2017; Wang and Griskevicius, 2014).

Self-identity, self-perception and self-esteem impact on decision-making (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeill and Venter, 2019), as do both fashion and ethical consumption which are at opposite ends of a spectrum and add to the complexity of ethical fashion consumption (Niinimäki, 2010). Additionally, millennials demonstrate increased

awareness of self-identity, as is evident in their ambition and brand-consciousness (Achabou, 2020), often used within identity construction. The millennial '#selfie' trend which has appeared on Instagram approximately 300 million times, indicates that this generation are conscious of their perceived self on online platforms (Intel, 2017a). Fashion can therefore be central to identity and create linkages between perceived and ideal self (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeill and Venter 2019), as well as representing an ethical position (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). Further, fashion involvement provokes hedonistic emotive feelings that create (fashion) sensitivity to and consumption of brands that focus on fashion as portraying a lifestyle and promoting a sense of belonging to a fashion-orientated community society (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeill and Venter 2019). Brands understand the currency of curating an emotional narrative to improve brand engagement (Joshi and Garg, 2021). Accordingly, it can be concluded that fashion is a conduit to presenting self and identity within wider society, which McNeill et al. (2020) recognise as related to 'ego'. As such, self-concept is constructed and reinforced by identity, which is presented externally; millennials may be reluctant to sacrifice self-concept for sustainability and to manage this dissonance, they may consider what the fashion marketplace offers and apply resolution management. Or, given that this cohort are also more socially aware and conscious of their 'perceived-self' (Chan and Wong, 2012), they may begin to scrutinise the wider implications of production practice within the fashion industry (Niinimäki, 2010), aligning their preferences for protecting the earth's resources with their fashion behaviours (Fuentes and Fredriksson, 2016). Studies have also highlighted that when an individual's morals or values shift, so too does their personal identity and narrative (Strominger and Nichols, 2014). This implies that an individual will inevitably face dissonance to some degree, depending on the severity of belief

change or incongruent behaviour (Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik, 2020). Accordingly, Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory (1957) is utilised throughout this research and this discussion serves to give initial context of the psychology angle used when exploring millennial eco-fashion consumption.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts an interpretive approach to enable a deeper exploration of consumer attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of the eco-fashion industry (Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018; Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2015; Lydon et al., 2015; McNeill and Moore, 2015). Data collection consisted of a qualitative online survey in an interview template format hosted on a Google form. This was considered appropriate as millennials spend significant time socialising and engaging digitally (Lissitsa and Kol, 2016). This asynchronous data collection method is cost-effective, practical, time-efficient and scalable (Braun et al., 2020; Evans, Elford and Wiggins, 2012) and can provide rich data that helps sense-making (Braun et al., 2020), even if the format limits probing. In comparison, a face-to-face survey with sensitive questions can potentially induce feelings of guilt or shame (Boynton and Greenhalgh, 2004) and participants may provide bias responses to be 'socially acceptable' (Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018; McNeill and Moore, 2015). Therefore, this online survey potentially reduced inducing feelings of guilt or shame by providing distance due to a non-physical presence.

Having gained ethical approval for the research from Glasgow Caledonian University, participant consent was obtained in the opening explanation of the survey and anonymity was assured. The interview template contained open and closed questions

and was posted on personal Facebook and Instagram accounts for 24 hours, with each page connected to approximately 800 followers, the majority residing in the Central Belt of Scotland. The Facebook and Instagram users who would have been exposed to the online survey were between the ages of 18 to 29 years old with the majority born in Scotland (See Figure 3 for 'Characteristics of Scottish millennials sample from Online Survey'). The limitation for this timeframe was the assumption that the visibility of the post would be compromised by the continuous flow of new postings should it remain available for a longer period of time. Indeed, given the frequency with which social media accounts are accessed, it was assumed that the post would be buried by the volume of postings made over the duration. The post was targeted to millennial consumers due to this cohort's growing concern for sustainability (World Economic Forum, 2017), particularly regarding fashion production (Intel, 2017b) and their higher consciousness of their perceived self as signalling values (fashion, sustainability or both) in wider society (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeill and Venter 2019; Chan and Wong, 2012; Niinimäki, 2010). While participation was voluntary, the survey was titled 'Think eco, be eco?': this infers self-selection coverage bias (Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2004) as participants with higher levels of interest around sustainability may be more inclined to complete the survey. However, the interpretive nature of this piece of research is not to be statistically valid or representative, but to gain rich deep and complex data (Braun et al., 2004) into cognitive dissonance.

The survey contained three sections:

1. 'About You' - Demographic and behavioural (three multiple choice questions),

2. 'Your Fashion' - Fashion purchase behaviours, extent of action upon beliefs and relationship with fashion acquisition (four open ended questions, two multiple choice questions),
3. 'Being Eco' - Environmental conservation behaviours and perceptions, eco-fashion consumption behaviours (twelve open ended questions, one multiple choice question).

To avoid confusion, no jargon, vague language or technical terms were used in the questions (Simon, 2011), which was particularly important as the survey was posted remotely online without opportunities for participants to elaborate upon their responses. To ensure the survey was easily understood, a pilot was carried out enabling more coherent adaptations to be made. After the 24-hour period, the data were then transferred from Google forms into an Excel spreadsheet, allowing for the creation of infographic charts that illustrated frequencies of gender, age and annual income to be used for analysis. This included whether higher income impacted responses of how much fashion, or eco-fashion, they purchased.

The 37 participants who completed the template provided rich, lengthy responses, that were analysed thematically, generating four A3-sized pages of data. It is important to note that although the survey was posted online, it was only completed by participants based in Scotland, and this could be considered another limitation. Nevertheless, Scottish consumers do not vary greatly to those in the rest of the UK and similar international fashion retailers dominate UK high streets. Analysis identified patterns that were categorised into overarching themes, such as 'new trends', 'high price', 'guilt' and so on. These themes were compared with demographic information to consider if and how demographic characteristics influence behaviour. The responses were then

coded and organised to develop meanings and patterns congruent with Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theoretical framework (Goddard and Melville, 2004). These are presented in the next section.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The data collected from the online survey offered rich responses regarding views on eco-friendly lifestyles, fashion, and eco-fashion, as well as the relationship between sustainable beliefs and behaviour. The analysis identified themes that addressed the attitude-behaviour gap, cognitive dissonance (1957) and millennial self-identity concepts, all of which contribute to the originality of this research. Of the 37 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 66 per cent were female and 34 per cent were male. All were located in Scotland with incomes spanning £10,999 to £28,999. The majority consisted of females aged 22 to 25 years, earning £10,999 or below; the majority shopped for fashion monthly, while one female shopped weekly. Participant characteristics and manifestations of dissonance are captured below in Table 2. All responses were anonymised and grouped to illustrate how many participants gave similar responses for each question.

Table 2: Characteristics of Scottish millennials sample from online survey

Participant	Gender	Age (years)	Income (£)	Wardrobe usage	Fashion Consumption
1	Female	19-21	17,000 to 22,999	Majority	Weekly
2	Female	26-28	23,000 to 28,999	Minority	Weekly
3	Male	22-25	23,000 to 28,999	Majority	Monthly
4	Female	22-25	10,999 or below	50/50	Monthly
5	Female	22-25	23,000 to 28,999	50/50	Monthly
6	Male	22-25	10,999 or below	Minority	Monthly
7	Female	22-25	Prefer not to say	Minority	Monthly
8	Female	22-25	23,000 to 28,999	50/50	Monthly
9	Female	22-25	10,999 or below	Minority	Yearly
10	Female	19-21	10,999 or below	50/50	Weekly
11	Female	22-25	10,999 or below	50/50	Monthly
12	Female	26-28	10,999 or below	Minority	Yearly
13	Male	22-25	11,000 to 16,999	50/50	Weekly
14	Male	22-25	17,000 to 22,999	Minority	Yearly
15	Male	22-25	17,000 to 22,999	50/50	Monthly
16	Female	22-25	23,000 to 28,999	Majority	Weekly
17	Male	19-21	10,999 or below	Minority	Yearly
18	Female	19-21	Prefer not to say	Majority	Weekly
19	Male	22-25	17,000 to 22,999	50/50	Monthly
20	Female	22-25	10,999 or below	Minority	Monthly
21	Female	22-25	10,999 or below	50/50	Monthly
22	Female	22-25	23,000 to 28,999	50/50	Monthly
23	Female	26-28	17,000 to 22,999	Majority	Monthly
24	Female	19-21	10,999 or below	Majority	Monthly
25	Female	22-25	11,000 to 16,999	50/50	Weekly
26	Male	22-25	17,000 to 22,999	Minority	Monthly
27	Male	22-25	11,000 to 16,999	Majority	Monthly
28	Female	26-28	10,999 or below	50/50	Monthly
29	Female	22-25	17,000 to 22,999	50/50	Monthly
30	Male	22-25	11,000 to 16,999	Majority	Monthly
31	Male	22-25	11,000 to 16,999	50/50	N/A
32	Female	22-25	10,999 or below	Majority	Yearly
33	Male	22-25	35,000 or above	Minority	Weekly
34	Male	22-25	29,000 to 34,999	50/50	Monthly
35	Female	22-25	11,000 to 16,999	Majority	Monthly
36	Female	26-28	29,000 to 34,999	50/50	Monthly
37	Male	22-25	23,000 to 28,999	Majority	Monthly
38	Female	22-25	10,999 or below	Majority	Weekly

As conceptualisations of eco-fashion may be perceived as abstract (Wiederhold and Martinez, 2018; Harris et al., 2016; McNeil and Moore, 2015), and the definition of 'eco-fashion' is ever-changing due to many different subjective opinions and perceptions, Niinimäki (2010) and Fletcher (2008) state that it is fashion designed to be ethically and ecologically produced to provide longevity for the consumer.

The participants' conceptualisation of 'eco-fashion' fell within five broad themes: 'Sustainability/eco-friendly', 'Recycled', 'Second-hand', 'Fairtrade/ethical' and 'Long-lasting'. Despite the research focus on environmental sustainability, the participants' acknowledgement of 'Fairtrade/ethical' illustrates their awareness of the socially moral aspects of fashion production. For example, several participants highlighted problems like animal testing, exploitation of factory workers and poor working conditions in developing countries as distasteful practices. For example, Participant-13 defined eco-fashion as: '*Clothing which does not contain fur, leather, not made by people who are making minimum wage in sweatshops*', supporting Scaturro's (2008) definition of eco-fashion. This could be a consequence of allegations of worker exploitation which receive more media attention than environmental exploitation (Ritch and Brownlie, 2016).

The findings focus on stages one to three of cognitive dissonance theory to capture the inconsistency of attitudes and behaviours expressed within dissonance and the remedy of changing belief, action or action perception (Festinger, 1957) (Figure 1). The results indicate an increased awareness of the need to adopt an eco-friendly lifestyle as indicated in the introduction. Evidence of this is presented below and the main findings are captured in Table 3.

Table 3: Main findings from the research

Analytic theme	Sub theme
Higher consciousness of eco-friendly lifestyles	Sustainable food prioritisation Vegan diet Limiting single use plastic Utilising the second-hand clothing market Eco-friendly household cleaning products
Limitations of the eco-fashion market	Reduced sizing options Limited style of fashion trends Barriers of price and accessibility Temptation of fast-fashion and marketing tactics Fashion consciousness supersedes sustainability
Experiencing cognitive dissonance	Outcomes of cognitive dissonance: guilt; indifference; contradictory behaviours; irritation; regret; indifference Action change: a change in behaviour to include sustainability consciousness Action perception change: Application of a rationale of justification for not changing behaviour No change: aware, but not actioned sustainable practice
Self- concept	Using fashion to create of self-identity to signify ideal self Alleviate low mood and bolster wellbeing Construct persona

4.1 Eco-friendly lifestyles

When participants were asked how they navigate eco-friendly lifestyles, a large number expressed high engagement with a number of sustainable behaviours, as indicated in the quotes below:

“[I am] vegan, I try to shop as close to zero in waste were affordable, practical and possible. I buy a lot of clothes from charity shops” Participant-1

“I eat a vegan diet, recycle where possible and try to use eco-friendly household cleaners” Participant-12

“I aim to recycle as much as possible, food, clothes etc. Second-hand clothes from apps like Depop. And recycle clothes for charity or DIY personalisation [of my behaviours]” Participant-21

“I recycle plastic, I buy most of my clothes from vintage stores, I don’t take any straws with my drink, I reuse plastic bags” – Participant-30

The quotes above indicate a higher consciousness for eco-friendly concepts and behaviours, as noted in the literature (Laville and Watt, 2019; Atamian Hahn-Petersen, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2017), and illustrate adapting behaviours to align actions with beliefs (Stage 1 of Festinger’s theory). This includes adopting a vegan diet, reducing what is sent to landfill (such as single use plastic) and seeking products without chemicals. Those behaviours are highly topical: for example the ‘#vegan’ has more than 103 million posts on Instagram (Instagram, 2020) and plant-based diets are also increasingly recognised by producers, retailers and marketers (Smithers, 2020). Another actioned behavioural change is buying clothing from second-hand markets (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016).

While the participants described many examples of well-known sustainable practices, they also expressed struggling with the difficulties of integrating sustainability into all aspects of their lifestyle, particularly fashion. Consistent with the sustainable fashion literature (Atamian Hahn-Petersen, 2018; Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Joyner Armstrong et al., 2016; Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016; McNeil and Moore, 2015), participants expressed that availability, size and style were barriers to purchasing eco-fashion. For example:

“For a 6ft 2 broad muscular male, there is very little available or targeted towards my shape or style” Participant-27

“Style and price are important, I won’t buy something just because it is eco-friendly” Participant-4

Identity and appearance are important for most consumers and not just restricted to millennials, nevertheless, the social norm of active social media engagement and the rise of portraying self in a #selfie on social media platforms (Intel, 2017a) is a growing phenomenon within millennial and younger cohorts (Hackley, Hackley and Bassiouni, 2018). Within self-concept are symbolic messages relating to values that are ideographically important (Aronson, 1968) such as success or ambition. Props, including fashion, are used to portray this to an audience (McNeill et al., 2020; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Ritch and Brownlie (2016) found that self-concept and appearance would not be sacrificed for what was considered abstract or debatable ethical accusations. Given that fashion and eco-ideologies sit at opposing spectrums (Chan and Wong, 2012; Niinimäki, 2010), self-concept would appear to ascribe to either one or the other. Therefore, value is situated within emotive constructs of self and belonging (McNeill et al., 2020) as opposed to environmental concerns, despite eco-friendliness being important in other consumption contexts.

There were also several acknowledgements of higher pricing, particularly as many participants relied on high street fashion, much of which is produced using the fast-fashion business model of low pricing and rapidly evolving styles that increase the environmental impact (Ritch, 2020; Papahristou and Bilalis, 2017; Reimers, Magnuson and Chao, 2016; Bly, Gwozdz and Reisch, 2015; Niinimäki, 2010). For example, Participant-3 who did not purchase eco-fashion expressed:

“It should be something I'm more concerned about. I don't believe clothing brands do enough to be eco-friendly. The majority of the fashion industry is still focused on low costs rather than environmental consciousness. It's difficult to commit to eco-friendly fashion when the vast majority of items for sale are not [produced] environmentally” Participant-3

Participant-3 begins by acknowledging dissonance, questioning her lack of concern for the impact of her fashion consumption, and suggests it is because the fashion industry focuses on encouraging purchasing with low pricing (Keegan, Ritch and Siddiqui, 2021; Kidd, Ritch and Carey, 2020; Reimers, Magnuson and Chao, 2016). Keegan, Ritch and Siddiqui (2021) found that marketing tactics encourage frequent impulsive consumption that provide gratification. The quote above indicates Participant-3 ascribes blame to the fashion industry and that the industry's tactics prohibit her commitment to an eco-friendly lifestyle (Bly, Gwozdz and Reisch, 2015). The ease of access (Papahristou and Bilalis, 2017) and promise of novelty (Reimers, Magnuson and Chao, 2016; Niinimäki, 2010) that shape dominant fashion acquisition have not been challenged by the participants. Without fast-fashion retailers nudging consciousness for sustainability, consumers appear to follow social norms of purchasing through mainstream fashion retailers, as noted by Participant-28:

“I tend to shop on standard large company sites such as Misguided or Pretty Little Thing [Online fast-fashion retailers] who don't speak about eco-fashion”

Participant-28

Rather than seeking eco-fashion, there is an expectation that fashion retailers should address the issues and as fast-fashion retailers “*don't speak about eco-fashion*” there is a passive acceptance of a status quo where the issues are hidden (Ritch, 2020).

This allows consumers to also avoid addressing sustainability, and subsequently excuse feelings of dissonance. This is evident in the quote below, whereby as asserted in the literature, low pricing entices repetitive consumption with marketing tactics (Keegan, Ritch and Siddiqui, 2021; Kidd, Ritch and Carey, 2020), as expressed by Participant-18:

“Modern society is acclimatised to disposable fashion, especially younger generations who want to keep up with trends. It is hard to imagine how one could find accessible fashion elsewhere than the high street or cheaper online shops such as Boohoo or Missguided” Participant-18

This “acclimatisation” of “modern society” reflects an acceptance that fast-fashion is not eco-friendly, and that consumers are accustomed to purchasing inexpensive trendy garments; collectively, this reduces the tendency to adjust their actions to align with eco-friendly beliefs (Kidd, Ritch and Carey, 2020; Bly, Gwozdz and Reisch, 2015). As fashion represents self-concept (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeil and Venter 2019; Arnould and Thompson, 2005), there is a disconnect with an eco-ideology that does not enable the preferences of protecting the earth’s resources with fashion behaviours (Fuentes and Fredriksson, 2016). Moreover, the fashion sensitivity that McNeill et al. (2020) identified is evident in both of the above quotes: socially prescribed and normalised access to fashion is through fast-fashion retailers and it is here that a sense of belonging within society can be found and used to build identity. The prevalence of this attitude indicates an accepted recognition that eco-friendliness is expressed through other consumption contexts and fashion is distinctly separate.

However, concern for sustainability appears to be evolving, for example Participant-15 stated: *“I’ve never really thought about it until recently to be honest”* and Participant-

5 reflected upon how their thoughts had *“definitely changed. I’ve reduced my consumption of new clothes [and] prefer buying from charity shops”*. This illuminates upon the space between action and belief representing inconsistencies that lead to dissonance (Stage 2 of Festinger’s theory), as well as efforts to reduce dissonance (Stage 3).

As this is not being acknowledged by the fashion industry, Participant-2 reinforces that the *“fashion industry is still focused on low costs rather than being environmentally conscious”*, while Participant-38 admits that the industry *“is not eco-friendly however it does not affect (their) shopping habits”*. This demonstrates that whilst these participants acknowledge and justify the impact of fashion on the environment, yet they did not change their beliefs or actions, similar to the research by Achabou (2020). Consistent with the literature, here, cognitive dissonance was experienced when reflecting upon purchasing fast-fashion, however this time the lack of action or change in beliefs or behaviours led to feelings of guilt.

4.2. Experiencing Cognitive Dissonance

It is important to note that similar to the findings by Achabou (2020) some participants did not experience dissonance and therefore dismissed the need for behavioural change: for example, Participant-20 stated: *“I just thought to myself, why not, I want it!”*. Others managed cognitive dissonance by devolving responsibility for fashion being eco-friendly, for example Participant-28 told herself that she *“can only afford fast-fashion items”*; she does not change her beliefs in the importance of eco-friendliness, she does allow herself reprieve to avoid disrupting her behaviour, which was as noted above centred within mainstream fast-fashion retailers. Participant-28 here illustrates

action perception change. However, the participants who reported experiencing cognitive dissonance expressed guilt, as evident in the quotes below:

"I feel guilt thinking about the [fast-fashion] workers' rights" Participant-9

"I felt bad supporting an unethical system" Participant-35

"I feel guilty after buying, deep down I have a sense that I can do without"
Participant-19

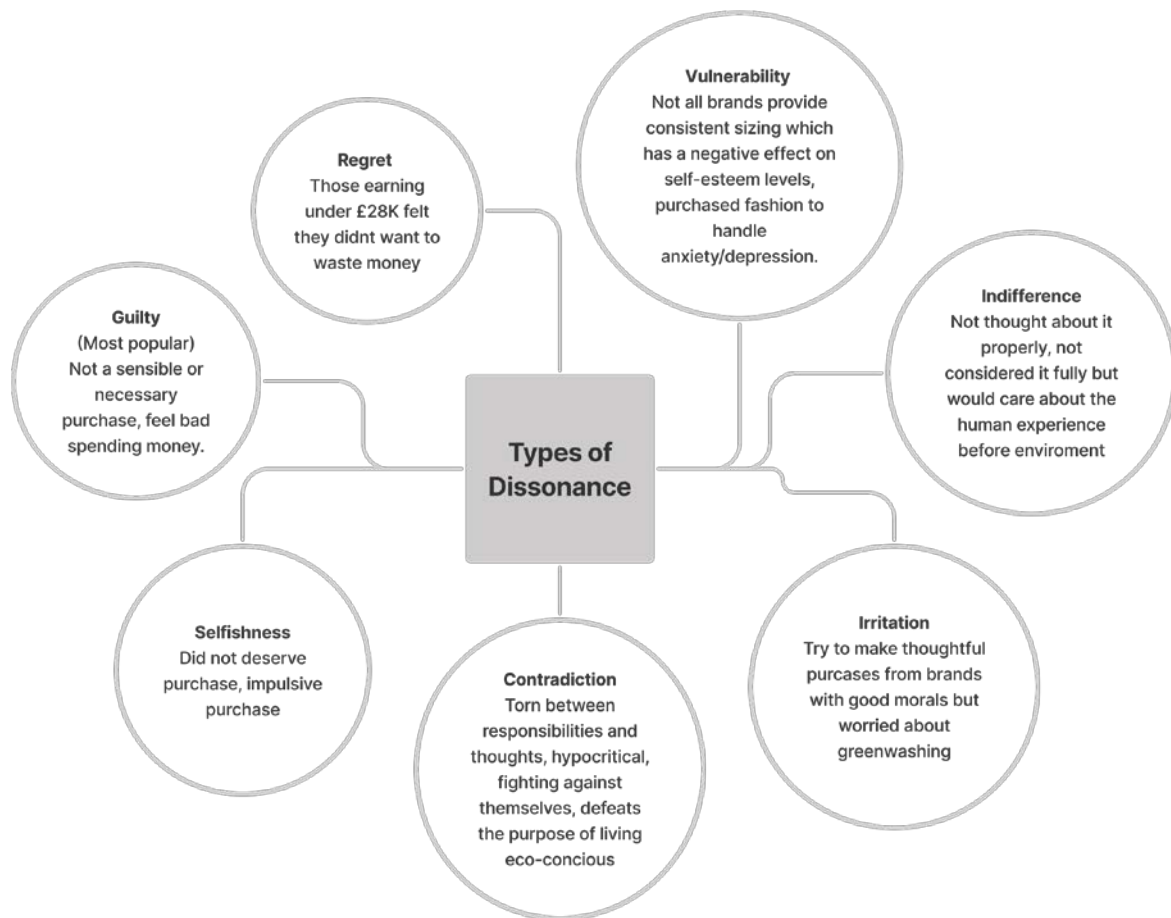
These quotes illustrate dissonance through feelings of unease when buying into a system that is recognised as being exploitative (Participant-35) of the workers involved in production (Participant-9) and recognising that often purchases are made through desire rather than need and that overconsumption contributes to degradation of the environment (Participant-19). What Participant-19 describes is a focus on 'wants' rather than 'needs', which subliminally links to 'wants' to create 'ideal-self' rather than 'need' for 'actual-self'. Aronson (1968) highlights that an individual's 'ideal-self' is not always cohesive with their 'actual-self'. The notion of 'ideal-self' and 'actual-self' being aligned gives an individual a sense of harmony and peace (Epstein, 1993), acting as a resolution to dissonance. Yet Participant-19 reports guilty feelings, suggesting that consumption does not reflect ideal-self past instant gratification.

Similar to the research by Achabou (2020), these participants do not try to ignore or excuse conflicting beliefs. However, this does not, as illustrated in Festinger's theory (Stage 3), result in changing belief or action. Oftentimes, fashion purchasing is attributed to feeling vulnerable, for example in response to "*negative effects on self-esteem*" (Participant-11) or "*temporarily help feelings of anxiety or depression*" (Participant-18), manifesting in notional expectations that the emotive experience of

consumption will improve participants' sense of self, relevance and belonging (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeil and Venter 2019). This was the experience of Participant-10 who often "*posted a picture*" on social media of herself in newly acquired fashion item because it made her "*happy to know it has been seen*". This action indicates she values the peer endorsement her created identity persona elicits (likes and comments on social media), an act supported by fashion as a prop (Donnison, 2007; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). However, once worn and seen, Participant-10 disposes of the item in what she describes as a "*vicious cycle*". This not only illustrates the throwaway culture instigated by fast-fashion (Papahristou and Bilalis, 2017), but also the importance of self-construct as driving fashion consumption to portray relevance within a fashion-orientated community (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeil and Venter 2019).

Analysis found that dissonance was experienced in seven types, as presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Types of Dissonance



As mentioned previously and evident in the above figure, a number of participants reported feeling guilt post-purchase. Guilt results in the participants feeling “*torn*” (Participant-3) and “*fighting against yourself*” (Participant-14) and the scale of the issues experienced by those “*contradictions*” (Participant-19) illustrates the complexities of engaging with eco-fashion. The scale of the issues around sustainability appear insignificant compared to the large scale of fast-fashion industries and ‘throwaway’ consumer culture, (Scaturro, 2008). To focus responsibility onto consumers does not reflect the many sacrifices required by consumers to be entirely sustainable, particularly given the multiple barriers within the current marketplace. Ritch (2020) argues that fashion consumers are pawns in a game where

they did not understand the rules, in relation to production and consumption and how this relates to eco-friendliness. The participants from this research expressed similar concerns. For example, Participant-21 felt “*consumed in capitalism*”; similarly, Participant-5 expressed:

“I try to make thoughtful purchases from brands that have good morals, but sometimes you wonder, do any?” Participant-5

The scale of these problems may demotivate consumers (Sima, 2014), as evident in Participant-10’s response:

“I recycle however I find it demotivating to do small things when I know the scale of the issue.” Participant-10’s

However, Participant-19 felt that “*if everyone made more of an effort, collectively it would make a difference*”. These contradicting statements reinforce that even if concern for the environment is overwhelming, the importance of sustainability is common within millennial discourse. While cognitive dissonance and experiencing guilt in purchasing fast-fashion has been reported in previous literature (Ritch and Brownlie, 2016), the research presented in this paper reveals a novel development within the third stage of changing action perception as a means to reduce dissonance through adopting an eco-friendly system.

For example, in a means to help alleviate the dissonance experienced from overconsumption (and disposal) of fast-fashion, Participant-10 reported investing in a higher priced eco-fashion garment which she wore more frequently “*to get my money’s worth*”. Since she is a price-orientated consumer, getting full value out of purchases and making her money go further is important for her. However, this does not enable

the act of posting a selfie in newly acquired fashion which, ironically for Participant-10, then inevitably leads to dissonance (Stage 4).

Examples of Stage 3 action changes and perception action changes are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Types of Dissonance and examples of post purchase dissonance resolutions

Participant	Types of Dissonance	Dissonance resolutions post purchase – ‘examples’
1	Guilt	<u>Action change</u> : ‘stop purchasing leather, wool, animal based products and fast-fashion’
2	Indifference	<u>Action change</u> : ‘researched further and changed my spending habits’
3	Contradiction	<u>Action perception change</u> : ‘Justified the purchase’
4	Irritation	<u>Action change</u> : ‘sometimes give clothes to other people who I know will wear them’
5	Guilt	<u>Action perception change</u> : ‘I usually just wear them and enjoy wearing them and it kind of evens itself out’
6	Irritation	
7	Regret	
8	Indifference	<u>No change</u> : ‘I have yet to act on this. Money is a limitation; not confident clothing is ethical.’
9	Guilt	<u>Action perception change</u> : ‘I post a picture in my clothing, makes me happy to know it’s been seen, even if it is then binned, which is a vicious circle.’
10	Irritation	<u>Action change</u> : ‘Not buy clothes in a while’
11	Indifference	
12	N/A	
13	Guilt	
14	Contradiction	
15	Indifference	
16	N/A	
17	Indifference	
18	Indifference	<u>Action change</u> : ‘I try to use a one in one out system, give to charity or sell on Depop, don’t feel like I am hoarding, feel useful because old clothing will go to someone who wants it more than me’
19	Contradiction/guilt	<u>Action perception change</u> : ‘I just thought to myself, why not, I want it.’
20	Selfishness	<u>Action change</u> : ‘Buying one meaningful thing instead of many.’
21	Guilt	<u>Action change</u> : ‘Shop less for cheap clothes and buy better quality even if it is more expensive.’
22	Selfishness	
23	N/a	<u>Action change</u> : ‘Justify expensive purchases so I don’t feel as guilty.’
24	Indifference	
25	Indifference	<u>Action change</u> : ‘Did research after Primark’s working conditions reports, decided to shop shopping there for a while.’
26	N/A	
27	N/A	
28	Contradiction/guilt	<u>Action perception change</u> : ‘I just tell myself I can only afford fast-fashion’
29	Guilt	
30	Guilt/indifference	<u>Action change</u> : ‘Wore the item a lot.’
31	Regret	
32	Guilt/indifference/selfishness	<u>Action change</u> : ‘Focus on spending the money on more important things.’
33	N/A	
34	N/A	
35	Guilt/irritation	<u>Action change</u> : ‘I only buy second-hand clothing, I only shop on the high street for underwear and socks.’
36	N/A	
37	Indifference/irritation	
38	Indifference	<u>Action perception change</u> : ‘I only buy what I truly love.’

4.3 Action change to adopt an eco-friendly system

Cognitive dissonance theory indicates changing action as a resolution to reduce dissonance. Here, some of the participants evidenced understanding that over-consumption is problematic and a growing awareness of collaborative-consumption that responds to a circular economy which maintains garments and textiles within consumer circulation models. As discussed previously, some of the participants expressed guilt from purchasing fast-fashion as a response to acknowledging the inconsistency between action and belief, and others felt that changing belief or action may in some way compromise their self-identity. The key finding of this piece of research is that a majority of respondents evidenced action change to resolve cognitive dissonance. Examples of action change included: limiting fashion expenditure (Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016), investing in higher quality, more expensive clothing for longevity purposes (Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2015) or better wardrobe management. For example, Participant-18 stated:

“I try to use a one in one out system now, if I buy a new top, I find one I don’t wear often and give it to charity or sell it on Depop (an app for redistributing used garments within consumer-to-consumer markets). This way I don’t feel I am hoarding clothes, and [my] old clothing will go to someone who wants it more than me” Participant-18

Participant-18 describes wardrobe management as a way of not “*hoarding*” clothing, as well as ensuring that clothing owned is worn, and this action helps to avoid dissonance. Behind wardrobe management lies the knowledge of what garments are already owned. Kidd, Ritch and Carey (2020) found that continued purchasing results

in unmanageable wardrobes which does not take-into-account what is already owned, results in the acquisition of similar garments, many of which are unwanted. The researchers also found that a lack of wardrobe management causes anxiety as participants feel overwhelmed by the volume of garments owned. In addition, new purchases made to improve feelings of self-esteem and hedonism led to guilt when evaluating how much money they had spent on 'hoarding'. Therefore, wardrobe management avoids repeat consumption and offers more control over consumption; it allows to mindfully make the most of scarce resources already in circulation (Fletcher, 2008); and it contributes to the circular economy (Ritch, 2019).

Congruent with research by Harris, Roby and Dibb (2016), the participants in this research also reported buying second-hand clothing:

“Buying second-hand [ensures] I am making use of materials already produced into clothing - the damage is already done and there is no harm in wearing [and] the money goes towards a second-hand business, Depop seller, [or] charity shop” Participant-35

There has been a rise in consumer-to-consumer online platforms that support the redistribution of garments and this model is responsive to the overconsumption encouraged by low pricing and marketing (McNeil and Venter, 2019). Just as overconsumption led to guilt and anxiety for Kidd, Ritch and Carey's (2020) participants, Participant-32 explained that reducing consumption enabled them to “*spend money on more important things*”. Participants with such behaviours considered that it takes more cognitive skill to change their actions, yet this enabled more positive emotions post-purchase fashion due to the absence of guilt. This is a similar action to adopting a vegan diet—more planning and thinking is required initially

to adapt to new consumption routines. The marketplace however has now acknowledged the growth of veganism as a response to preferences for an eco-friendly diet and as a result introduced plant-based food into mainstream food retailers (Smithers, 2020). In contrast, the majority of the fashion industry has not acknowledged millennials' preferences for an eco-friendly lifestyle and our research reveals that some participants refrain from living an eco-friendly lifestyle because of 'self-identity' issues and therefore remain in a space of dissonance (Stage 4 of Festinger's theory). While McNeill et al. (2020) and Laville and Watt (2019) established that millennials are depicted as conscious of how their personal values and attitudes are perceived by others, and often reflected through their social media profiles, this research reveals that 'self-concept' includes their stance on ethics, consumption and purposeful reflected action.

5.LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Given that this research worked from a small sample who were all located in Scotland, this should be seen as a limitation, as well as the sample only having had a short space of time to acknowledge the survey on specific social media platforms (Bryman and Bell, 2015). While it was suggested previously that bias for eco-fashion may have skewed engagement, there was still much variation and expression of complexity found in the data. The potential relationship between young millennials and eco-fashion can be further investigated through in-depth data analysis to understand why some millennials have a stronger engagement with eco-fashion than others and measuring their degree and pursuit of sustainable living. With reference to young millennials' display of a range of feelings of dissonance in relation to their fashion and

eco-fashion consumption behaviour, more research can be implemented to explore experiences of dissonance, as this is an area with the least amount of supporting literature, particularly around changing beliefs, changing actions and changing action perceptions. Further research could include measuring the strengths of dissonance through both qualitative and quantitative data, and also explore why individuals choose not to resolve dissonance.

Table 5: Future directions

Recommendations for future research
1. Further understanding into why some millennials have stronger engagement with eco-fashion.
2. Exploration into the correlation between millennials' demographic traits, previous consumption experiences and the types of dissonance they experience (contradiction, irritation, indifference, passiveness).
3. Investigation into the basic intentions behind resolving (or not resolving) feelings of dissonance and applying these insights to millennials' consumption of eco-fashion.
4. Understanding how to measure strengths of dissonances and how resolutions are induced.
5. Ensuring the sampling strategy allows for inclusion of a wide range of respondents and perspectives.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore the reported ethical attitude-behaviour gap through the specific lens of millennials (aged 19-28) and their engagement with fashion, eco-fashion and eco-friendly lifestyles. The research was informed by three research questions, firstly by examining what sustainable adaptations millennial consumers have incorporated into everyday behaviours and found that consciousness for sustainable practice was elevated in many consumption contexts. One prevalent example of this was the number of participants who had adopted a vegan diet, contributing to this lifestyle through their social media postings. Despite the rising popularity of veganism borne out of concern for sustainability, the participants reported that the fashion continued to neglect sustainability, in marketing and in production.

Secondly, the paper explored how millennial consumers manage cognitive dissonance implications from fashion acquisition and thirdly, the role of self-concept in sustainable fashion acquisition. Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010) had previously postulated that limited research has been carried out on resolving dissonance in relation to eco-fashion consumption, particularly using Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory that incorporates self-construct into the framework. While the research found that the established barriers of price, style and accessibility were evident (Atamian Hahn-Petersen, 2018; Taljaard, Sonnenberg and Jacobs, 2018; Harris, Roby and Dibb, 2016; Joyner Armstrong et al., 2016; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016; McNeil and Moore, 2015), along with the prevalence of normalised social conduits of fashion providing exoneration from sustainability which mirror Achabou's (2020) findings, this research advances our understanding of dissonance by illustrating an action change underpinned by concerns for sustainability. The evidence from our data indicates that in the absence of the fashion industry responding to concerns, some consumers are changing action to adopt an eco-friendly fashion system to address their fashion acquisition patterns and resolve dissonance.

This research reveals that self-construct is responsible for the dissonance experienced in Stage 3, leading into debates around fashion, style and clothing, impacting on collaborative consumption and redistribution markets (Crane and Bovone, 2006). While arguably, garments have basic utilitarian purposes, the design and construction of materials symbolically represent stylistic values that are made meaningful within wider society (Crane and Bovone, 2006). Therefore, self-construct is perpetuated by the fast-fashion model that focuses on trend change with its accelerated production, purchasing and disposal linear model, all of which impact on the environment, rather than style and craftsmanship of garment construction as a

tenet of value (Ritch, 2020) as depicted in the slow fashion movement (Fletcher, 2008). This is visible in participants' reflections who highlight the feel-good factor of new fashion acquisition that bolsters self and wellbeing particularly when projected externally - through for example social media, despite also acknowledging the transience of the feeling and image and experiencing dissonance as a result. This is an important advancement of our understanding of cognitive dissonance in relation to fast-fashion consumption: it is not only rapid style changes that increase consumption, but also the need to constantly nourish those emotions that bolster self-concept. Moreover, the participants acknowledge their behaviours and experience of dissonance captured within this '*vicious cycle*'. This was evident in this research as particular relevance to millennials who use their social media presence, through the #selfie phenomenon, to indicate their self-construct. Fast-fashion provides a means of constructing and reinventing relevance and trendiness (McNeill et al., 2020; McNeill and Venter, 2019). Consequently, there was a reluctance to implement their own sustainable strategies to avoid sacrifice that would impact upon their time, enjoyment, or hedonistic experience.

From a practical perspective, the fashion industry could support eco-friendly ideologies through engaging and encouraging peer-to-peer lending and selling platforms, enabling consumers to rent fashion rather than purchase. This would respond to self-construct desires for variety of fashion to post on social media and biodegradable materials that can support both the fast-fashion industry and eco-friendliness with alternative eco-fashion. Due to the research participants' overall high receptiveness for sustainable living, this research has highlighted that the fashion industry significantly refrains consumers from living a more sustainable life and

demonstrates the gravity of how self-concept influences fashion consumption behaviour in conjunction with their chosen dissonance resolutions.

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